

Monument underway to honor black war soldiers

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WASHINGTON (AP) —

Margot Webb, a retired professor living in North Miami Beach, has spent the last two years poring over military records, scanning census data and looking through soldier names on a hunch that her great-grandfather served in a black troop during the Civil War.

She has whittled down her options to six "Isaac Smiths" but still doesn't know which one is her ancestor.

"I'm having a hard time getting to the right one," said Webb, 87, a genealogist. "If I just had an idea of what company he was in."

The African-American Civil War Memorial Foundation estimates at least 7 million blacks are descended from Civil War servicemen. For some, like Webb, tracing roots can prove difficult.

But a new memorial and heritage center in the nation's capital aims to shed light on history's forgotten troops. The African-American Civil War Memorial Foundation has broken ground on a \$2 million project to salute black servicemen.

"We've come here to start the process of setting the record straight," said memorial chairman Frank Smith Jr., a District

The 9-foot high, 2-ton bronze sculpture, called the Spirit of Freedom, depicts a group of soldiers in service. Two stone walls around the statue will bear the names of an estimated 209,000 soldiers who served in the United States Colored Troops.

The project, above a subway stop in Washington's Shaw neighborhood, is scheduled to be dedicated next spring.

The memorial is a "thank you to colored soldiers for fighting for freedom, for fighting even when people didn't want them to," said Mayor Marion Barry.

The National Park Service, which is building a database of Civil War soldiers from National Archives records, is providing the names for the memorial.

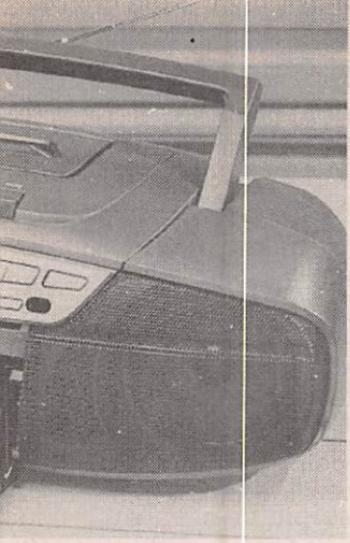
The foundation is also working on a Family Heritage Center, to be housed in the Garnet-Patterson Middle School near the memorial, which will include computers and searchable databases.

Harold Ashby, a 49-year-old college teacher in Honolulu, said he believes the project will give blacks a stronger sense of cultural identity.

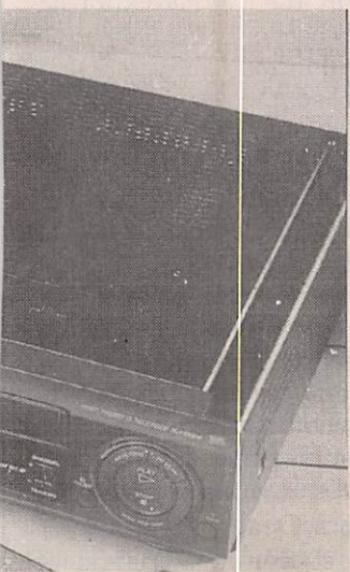
"I think it's important for a younger generation, especially a younger black generation, to have some grounding," said Ashby, who keeps the discharge papers of his great-grandfather, George Ashby, in his bedroom.

Ashby is still investigating where George Ashby was born and how he got to Trenton, N.J., where he enlisted in 1864.

"In some ways, I don't even know where I'm from," Ashby said.



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Medhat Menabbawy, the official in charge of antiquities in northern Cairo, has a short answer when asked if all 200 monuments in his area can be saved: "Impossible!"

He said the government has set aside \$9 million to restore mosques, schools and tombs in his district, once a center of the medieval city. That covers only 13 monuments in the northern area, which holds one-third of Cairo's Islamic architectural treasures.

For the most part, the government has focused its efforts on preserving the treasures of Egypt's pharaonic era — which draw thousands of tourists daily — while the remnants of what was once a great medieval city turn to dust.

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